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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF  
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

Authority NLT 77-75

By HCIDB NLT Date MAY 30 1975

14 August 1951

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subject: The Military Effectiveness and Desirability  
of Employing Atomic Weapons Tactically in  
Korea

**RESTRICTED DATA**  
1. Reference is made to the request of Mr. Robert A. Levett

to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for their comments on a study prepared in the Department of the Army concerning the possible employment of atomic weapons in Korea, in the event that the present truce negotiations break down.

**AS DEFINED BY**  
2. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have evaluated this problem and have determined that under current conditions atomic weapons should be employed in the Far East ONLY in the event our forces in that area would otherwise be faced with a military disaster.



3. Foremost among the factors which the Joint Chiefs of Staff have considered in reaching the determination outlined in paragraph 2 above, is the extremely important one that tactical use of the weapon should not, short of urgent necessity, be undertaken prematurely, thus giving present and potential enemies opportunity to develop defenses against what would be new employment of an existing weapon. In short, it is the view of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the initial tactical use of atomic bombs should, if possible, be for a major purpose in a major theater of war. Furthermore, decision to employ the atomic bomb tactically should be made only after full consideration is given to the fact that it may result in enlarging the present area of conflict, increased Soviet support through "volunteer" or puppet forces, compensatory pressure in other areas, or possibly the onset of full-scale hostilities.

4. However, present circumstances are such that a real and imminent threat of disaster could develop at any time. A possible

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critical point could be a failure of truce negotiations concurrently with the signing of the Japanese Peace Treaty.

5. Forces are now located in the Far East which, providing target intelligence is adequate, are capable of delivering atomic weapons to tactical targets in support of land forces in Korea. Delivery of atomic weapons on preplanned targets presents little difficulty. However, the weak link in applying this capability to an urgent and rapidly developing ground situation is the lack of tested methods and procedures for providing tactical atomic support of engaged land forces.

6. ~~AS DEFINED BY~~ Subject to your concurrence, the Joint Chiefs of Staff propose to dispatch directives to Commander in Chief Far East, Commanding General, Strategic Air Command, and Commander in Chief, Pacific (copies attached) requiring them to conduct practice atomic strikes in tactical support of ground forces to improve techniques and procedures in case such employment of atomic



weapons becomes necessary in the future.

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7. Actual atomic weapons, less nuclear components, will be used in these operations, except in actual flights over enemy territory, to insure that all procedures, such as assembly, testing, and loading of actual weapons, are thoroughly tested in the field.

OF 1946  
8. The foregoing preparatory measures can be taken without material delay or impairment of our ability to launch strategic air operations as planned.

9. Existing structure of command and organization, with augmentation at certain levels, is adequate to undertake tactical atomic operations. It is not considered necessary or desirable to superimpose special advisory staff elements of the type indicated in the study referred to the Joint Chiefs of Staff by Mr. Lovett.

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10. A Presidential Directive, as recommended in the Department of Army study, referred to in paragraph 1 above, is not considered necessary as preparation and training for possible use of a capability is purely a military function.

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For the Joint Chiefs of Staff;

HOYT S. VANDENBERG  
Chief of Staff, United States Air Force.

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Enclosures "A" and "B"